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SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

JERUSALEM ALSO FOR ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO
E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

- [1](#). Mideast
- [2](#). Campaign Against Terrorism

Key stories in the media:

All media quoted PM Sharon as saying Monday that if some coalition partners leave the government when he presents his disengagement plan to the cabinet after returning from the U.S., he will form a new coalition that very day. Maariv reported that State Attorney Edna Arbel's recommendation that Sharon be indicted frustrated Likud-Labor negotiations for the formation of a national unity government, in which six portfolios, including the foreign ministry, had allegedly been promised to the Labor Party. Ha'aretz reported that Sharon's speech to the Likud convention tonight will not mention his legal problems, nor the disengagement plan that is creating political problems for him. All media reported that Monday the High Court of Justice ordered Sharon's son Gilad to hand over potentially incriminating documents in two corruption probes involving the Sharon family.

Leading media reported that last night FM Silvan Shalom affirmed his support for Sharon. Jerusalem Post and Israel Radio quoted Shalom as warning Sharon against forming a coalition with the Labor Party. The radio quoted Shalom as saying that the leak of Arbel's recommendation was "wicked" and meant to influence the legal process. Jerusalem Post also reported that Shalom slammed Vice PM Ehud Olmert for suggesting that Israel should withdraw unilaterally, even without receiving U.S. compensation, and quoted Shalom as saying: "Those who are calling for unconditional unilateral separation are completely wrong. The Americans have been involved in every diplomatic agreement in Israel's history and their assistance should be welcome." Ha'aretz quoted Sharon as testifying before the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee that he agreed to evacuate four settlements in the northern West Bank because the quid pro quo from the U.S. would be much more "serious and significant" than if Israel only evacuated the Gaza Strip.

Maariv (Ben Caspit) reported that U.S. Ambassador Dan Kurtzer has been "flooded" by queries from the White House, the National Security Council and the State Department -- requesting that he try to explain to them what Sharon's real condition is, whether he is a lame duck and, if so, what is the degree of his handicap. Yated Ne'eman quoted MK Nissan Slomiansky, the chairman of the coalition's National Religious Party, as saying that Sharon does not have an option for an alternative government. Ha'aretz reported that dozens of cabinet ministers, Knesset members, local mayors, high-ranking IDF officers and other prominent public figures have in recent weeks signed a petition called "A People's Petition - We Will Be There" that brands dismantling settlements a "moral, national crime." Ha'aretz reported that today Stephen Hadley and Elliott Abrams from the White House, and William Burns from the State Department, will brief senior European officials in Brussels about last week's Israeli-American talks in Washington over the disengagement plan. The newspaper notes that the three U.S. envoys will then travel to Cairo to meet with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, followed by a visit to Amman to meet with Jordan's King Abdullah. The delegates are slated to meet with Sharon in Jerusalem Thursday.

Ha'aretz reported that while the IDF is "confused" about the disengagement plan, the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip are already making practical preparations toward an Israeli withdrawal. Ha'aretz reported that Egypt has mediated a deal to divide responsibilities and spheres of influence between Jibril Rajoub, the current National Security Advisor to PA Chairman Yasser Arafat, and Muhammad Dahlan, former head of the Gazan Preventive Security services, as Cairo moves ahead with its plan for unified security services in the PA and a unified Palestinian leadership to present to the Americans.

This morning, Israel Radio reported that the IDF, which fears that terrorists could leave Nablus to carry out attacks, is encircling the city.

The media reported that the Israeli Arab community will commemorate Land Day today, culminating in a protest strike and a march in the Galilee -- from the village of Arabe to the town of Sakhnin. Land Day marks the 28th anniversary of clashes with the police over land confiscation, in which six Israeli Arabs were killed.

Aluf Benn of Ha'aretz reviewed a new book, "Waging Peace: Israel and the Arabs, 1948-2003," by Prof. Itamar Rabinovich, one-time chief negotiator with Syria and former ambassador to the U.S. Rabinovich writes that Arafat is to blame for the failure of the Oslo peace process. However, he says that an interim deal can be struck with the Palestinians now -- but only with Arafat.

Leading media reported that Monday the Knesset Finance Committee approved the cabinet's decision to make an across-the-board cut of 4.8 billion shekels (around USD 1.06 billion) in the state budget for 2004.

All media reported that today the police will release freed Hizbullah captive Elchanan Tenenbaum and place him under house arrest.

In an exclusive Maariv feature, Italian Jew David Gerbi describes his recent visit to his native town: Tripoli, the Libyan capital.

Yediot reported that 70 supporters of nuclear whistleblower Mordecai Vanunu from around the world, including the actress Susannah York and Nobel Prizewinners, will come to Israel to celebrate his release in around three weeks.

Convicted spy Jonathan Pollard was quoted as saying in an interview with Maariv that he is entreating Sharon to "come and rescue" him during his upcoming visit to Washington.

Ha'aretz underscored President Bush's statement Monday that the seven new members of NATO (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Romania and Bulgaria) "bring moral clarity to the purposes of our alliance."

This morning, Israel Radio reported that a poll conducted in the U.S. found that Bush has regained his lead over Sen. John Kerry.

[1](#)1. Mideast:

Summary:

Liberal contributor, Tel Aviv University Prof. Tanya Reinhart wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "Even the U.S. has not yet dared execute publicly a spiritual-religious leader."

The Director of the Interdisciplinary Center's Global Research in International Affairs Center, columnist Barry Rubin wrote in conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "What are the implications of Ahmed Yassin's death for Palestinian politics?... The real issue is the power struggle between Fatah and Hamas."

Hebrew University Professor of Political Science and former Foreign Ministry director-general Shlomo Avineri wrote in Jerusalem Post: "The cold peace Egypt offered Israel should be kept. One can only wish something similar could be achieved with the Palestinians. Yet, in marking the 25th anniversary of this agreement, one should realize what it is -- and what the Egyptians chose it should not be."

Far-left, Arabic language Al-Ittihad editorialized:

"The successive U.S. administrations have used the [right of] veto at the Security Council to protect the Israeli aggressor from any international condemnation to stop its crimes.... This American position is serving and encouraging barbaric Israeli terrorism against the Palestinians."

Block Quotes:

I. "Israel vs. the Safeguards of Mankind's Conservation"

Liberal contributor, Tel Aviv University Prof. Tanya Reinhart wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (March 30): "Since 9/11, within the context of the war against terrorism, the United States has been applying pressure to cancel safeguards anchored in international law. But even the U.S. has not yet dared execute publicly a spiritual-religious leader (for instance, those of the Taliban in Afghanistan). Now, with U.S. blessing, the Israel has established that this, too, is allowed. The rule of the military is turning Israel into a leader in the destruction of the protections that mankind created for its own conservation -- protections that Israel may need someday, as already proved by history."

II. "The Fatah-Hamas Rivalry"

The Director of the Interdisciplinary Center's Global Research in International Affairs Center, columnist Barry Rubin wrote in conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (March 30): "What are the implications of Ahmed Yassin's death for Palestinian politics? In the short run, it brought sympathy for Hamas from the general population. But this event is unlikely to have much lasting impact. The real issue is the power struggle between Fatah and Hamas.... Arafat, as many Fatah leaders know, is responsible for the declining fortunes of his group as well as of his people. By refusing to take strong action against Hamas, stop terrorism, and rein in the thuggish activity of militias waging battle against Israel, he is discrediting the PA, Fatah, and the nationalist cause.... But Hamas has its own problems in the pursuit of power. However many terrorist attacks it can mount, it is going to be weaker without Yassin. Hamas is a very fragmented organization, with no alternative preeminent leader in sight.... While no one should have any illusions that Hamas will stop trying to strike Israel with terrorism, Rantisi's elevation is not going to make it a tougher organization. Speaking of Rantisi, let it not pass without notice that when Israel tried to kill him, one of the complaints brought by foreign politicians and journalists was that he was 'only' Hamas's spokesman and not involved in terrorism. As has repeatedly happened before, the organization's own decision shows how naive such distinctions are."

III. "Just an Absence of War"

Hebrew University Professor of Political Science and former Foreign Ministry director-general Shlomo Avineri wrote in Jerusalem Post (November 26): "Exactly a quarter of a century ago -- in March 1979 -- Israel and Egypt signed a peace treaty which put an end to decades of war between the two nations.... Yet today relations between Israel and Egypt are bitter, and Israelis speak of a cold peace.... It now appears that the Egyptian strategy has been, from the very beginning, not to move toward reconciliation and rapprochement. The current Palestinian Intifada is a mere excuse. In signing the treaty Egypt wanted -- legitimately -- to get back its territory, but in return it never aimed at anything save a cold peace.... Peace is not just an absence of war. It is a state of mind, a moral disposition, an ethical commitment. This is not what the Egyptians were seeking. The cold peace Egypt offered Israel should be kept. One can only wish something similar could be achieved with the Palestinians. Yet, in marking the 25th anniversary of this agreement, one should realize what it is -- and what the Egyptians chose it should not be."

IV. "Vetoes That Serve Terrorism"

Far-left, Arabic language Al-Ittihad editorialized (March 28): "The U.S. State Department's strategic planners have put forward an agenda of 'confronting' the sharp increase of hatred felt by the nations of the world ... towards American imperialism! But they [American foreign policymakers] didn't design policies to treat the real reasons for this hatred.... The blood of the people in the region, especially Palestinian

blood, is bleeding because of the American strategic aggression that grants unlimited support ... to Israel. In addition, the successive U.S. administrations have used the [right of] veto at the Security Council to protect the Israeli aggressor from any international condemnation to stop its crimes.... This American position is serving and encouraging barbaric Israeli terrorism against the Palestinians. This was also a clear message to the Arab regimes, on the eve of the proposed Arab league summit, that the U.S. Administration doesn't show any consideration for Arab leaders. They [Arab leaders] are nothing but zero."

12. Campaign Against Terrorism:

Summary:

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "There is a network of groups and governments that believe in using terror to subjugate the West and make the world safe for tyranny.... Intelligence can be a critical tool in winning this war, but it cannot tell us what the war is about or outline our broad strategy."

Block Quotes:

"Intelligence's Limits"

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (March 30): "The problem with the concept of 'intelligence failure' is that it presumes that intelligence normally succeeds. If there is any lesson from the investigations both here and in the U.S., it is that policy makers must assume the structural fallibility of their intelligence agencies.... What 9/11 shows ... is that if intelligence is to mean anything it must first have some grasp of the major currents sweeping the globe. Is it surprising that Western intelligence services missed 9/11 when they did not anticipate the fall of the Soviet Union?.... We should keep in mind not what we think we know, but what we do know: that there is a network of groups and governments that believe in using terror to subjugate the West and make the world safe for tyranny. We know they must be beaten, and that the key to beating them is to drive a handful of governments out of the terror business. We also know that tyranny and terror are inextricably linked, so that a policy of supporting Western values of freedom and human rights is also necessary to achieve peace and security. Intelligence can be a critical tool in winning this war, but it cannot tell us what the war is about or outline our broad strategy."

KURTZER